

Visitor centre appeal rejected

BY NEIL BRACEGIRDLE

neil.bracegirdle@suffolkfreepress.co.uk

@SFPNeil

Attempts to create a multi-million pound visitor centre in Horkesley Park, near Nayland, are over after a planning appeal was thrown out.

Bunting & Sons had been seeking to build the Stour Valley Visitor Centre – including an art gallery, craft studio, gardens and Suffolk Punch breeding centre – for the last 13 years.

On Thursday, it was revealed that Secretary of State Eric Pickles had agreed with the findings of an independent inspector and Colchester Council's planning committee that the proposals should not go ahead.

Campaigners have long argued the centre would have a detrimental impact on the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty – a large section of which would have been occupied by the 101-acre project.

Will Pavry, chairman of the Stour Valley Action Group, said the right decision had been made.

“There has been strong opposition

to it over the last 13 years,” he said. “We have always thought that the claimed benefits were vastly overstated and would be far less than what was projected.

“The impact on the local area in terms of additional traffic and people would be very harmful.”

The family firm behind the plans had claimed the park would generate 150 jobs and more than 300,000 visitors each year.

It appealed the decision of Colchester Borough Council to reject the proposals in February 2013 and, despite going into administration in October, was still fighting hard for the £12.9million scheme to be built.

“We are extremely sorry that we will not see the proposals come to fruition and feel people have sadly missed out on what would have been a wonderful attraction,” said Stephen Bunting, a senior partner of Bunting & Sons.

Mr Pickles, pictured, backed an inspector who concluded that the benefits of the centre, first put forward in April 2001, would not outweigh the negative impacts.

